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Communications and Questions.

So many questions and communications of general interest are received by the editors of the Biblical World, that it has seemed best to publish such of them as seem especially important, together with such answers as may be suggested.

Does the theory of evolution of the human species clash with the theory of a fall taught in Genesis? How can they be reconciled?

—CLERICUS.

Between the holiness of our Bible and the intelligence of our science no real inconsistency can exist. The appearance of such can arise only from the misunderstanding of one or both of them. In this instance we judge the Bible has been misunderstood, if the story of the fall be not recognized as belonging to the primitive traditions of humanity, devised with the noblest purpose ever possessing the mind of man, namely, the endeavor to explain the origin of evil in the world and at the same time to clear God from the charge of complicity with sin. The familiar but rarely comprehended fact that in this story a serpent is represented as endowed with the power of speech should alone convince one that here is something we must regard as shot through with poetry, and not opposed to science. When Comparative Religion is taught in our seminaries and universities this belief in animal speech will be recognized as a universal trait of primitive thought, with which science does not conflict, but lifts into higher meaning.

E. B.

Remonstrance on "Summer Bible Study, its Encouragements and its Warnings," (DR. WILLIAM R. HARPER in the BIBLICAL WORLD, September, 1895, pp. 161-67), made by REV. ALEXANDER B. GROSART, D.D., L.L.D., Dublin.

You will bear with me, I hope, if I proceed summarily to tell you the points wherein I feel called on to offer a respectful remonstrance and to seek explanations as well as make certain suggestions.

1. With reference to your sweeping generalization and condemnation of the American pulpit, because of its ministers' alleged ignorance of the Bible and want of interest in Sunday schools, Bible classes, instruction in the Bible, etc., and the absence of biblical and theological knowledge in their preaching, I might retort upon you the crushing reply of John Foster to the atheist, that it would require a man to be omniscient and omnipresent to affirm that there

is no God, seeing that somewhere, all unknown to him and beyond his ken, God might be. But I do not so retort on your necessarily limited knowledge of the vast and widely spread American pulpit. I simply question if your knowledge of so large an aggregate of American ministers is adequate to give authority to so wide a generalization. Individual ministers whom you have met and know about, may probably answer to your drastic description; but surely it is asking too much of us on this side of the Atlantic, to accept as true of the great body of Christian ministers in the United States, that they are of the sorry type you have painted — ignorant, lazy, unspiritual.

I speak, I am confident, for many of my fellow ministers when I state that very different is our estimate of the American pulpit. That estimate, based on full knowledge, is a high one of the general level or average. No doubt the American ministers who as visitors to the mother country occupy our pulpits and address our Sunday schools and visit our Bible classes, are exceptional men. None the less, placed beside exceptional British or Irish ministers, they hold their own. Nor is this all. Taking the American pulpit or sermon and theological literature, the average again leaves a very different impression from your representation. The preaching and exposition of America that reaches us is recognized as sharp, fresh, brilliant and eminently biblical. Besides all this, I can speak from my own knowledge and observation while a visitor-traveler in the United States for well-nigh a whole year. The *motif* of my visit and researches took me over nearly all the New England States and over many of the Southern, and wherever I went I found two things: (a) That my own preaching (if I must speak of it) was never and nowhere so acceptable as when I gave my audiences the old, old evangelical facts and doctrines; (b) That wherever I was a hearer I was struck with the high average of the preaching — deploring only the too frequent somewhat nasal and monotonous reading instead of delivery of the sermons. There was mental vigor, spiritual vision, full biblical knowledge, and often, and often fervid pæons of earnestness. Certainly I should never dream of placing the American pulpit beneath our own country's average (Scotland), or England, or Ireland.

I must frankly confess, therefore, that I am disposed to think your knowledge of faulty individuals and the perhaps laggard response and even thwarting of some, to your zealous efforts toward scientific study of the Bible, have led you to a pessimistic conclusion as to the decadence of the American pulpit, and emphatically as to the lack of biblical knowledge and of interest in the Sunday school, etc. I am wicked enough to be reminded of Dr. Thomas Chalmers's stratagem to get rid of an ultra self-blaming old maid — namely, by agreeing with her that she had a vile heart — that she was a wicked woman, and so on, and so on — ending in her turning upon the good doctor and demanding how he dared to blackguard a respectable member of his congregation — and no more of such pseudo-confessions. Do I wrong you in believing that anything approaching denunciation of the American pulpit

by a Britisher—any agreement with your condemnation of the American pulpit, by a Britisher—should have aroused your indignation?

2. I am, if possible, still more pained and troubled by your verdict on the Sunday schools of the United States. I could hardly credit my own eyes when I read the following:

“Nine-tenths of the teaching in the Sunday schools [of America] is, as teaching, a farce. The work of many of these so-called Sunday school teachers, if judged upon the standard of ordinary principles of pedagogy, is ludicrous, and at the same time criminal. It is ludicrous to call such work teaching. This work is criminal if it is looked at from the point of view of the innocent pupils who suffer from it” (p. 164).

Why, sir, if in anything the United States churches were held to be ahead of the mother-country, it was in the Sunday school. To have the American Sunday school teaching branded as a farce! takes away our breath in amazed bewilderment. For myself, I know no Sunday-school literature equal to that which, for many years, has come to us from the United States; *e. g.*, the studies and expositions of the year's lessons in anticipation, have to my knowledge proved at once helps and stimuli of no common kind and to no common degree. The “Westminster” lessons of the Presbyterians and Dr. Pentecost's and similar volumes have been systematically used and found to be first-class. With so out-and-out biblical and evangelical a literature at the command of your Sunday school teachers, and the multitude of inestimable Sunday school books used by your various denominational publishing societies, you must not be surprised if I am more than incredulous in regard to your pronouncement. Then, again, speaking for myself, I visited scores and scores of American Sunday schools and if I was impressed with the intellectual force and the spiritual note of the American pulpit, still more was I impressed with the intelligence, the biblical knowledge, the readiness and raciness of response on the part of classes examined and mustered, schools addressed and interrogated. So that, altogether, I am perplexed by your vehement condemnation and charges of ignorance and criminality.

Put the thing to the vote, and I shall be disappointed indeed if there be not millions in the United States eager to testify to undying benefits received in the Sunday school. I must also be permitted to doubt that the Bible is so unvalued and unused in American families as you represent. I have “sunny memories” of households of New England and of the Southern states, *e. g.*, Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas, wherein the Bible was enthroned as the Book of God and the god of books, and where I breathed a heavenly atmosphere.

3. Scarcely less disturbing and poignantly painful is your supercilious attitude toward the American Sunday school teachers, on the plea that they are, “uneducated, unskilled, and sometimes unconsecrated teachers” (p. 164).

Surely, surely sir, it is a poor return for the fine devotedness, the ungrudg-

ing labors, the persistently continuous fidelity of attendance, the love and compassion of the multitudes of "uneducated, unskilled" men and women found in your country's and in our Sunday schools, to so chastise them. It is to the honor of relatively lowly and hard-working "common people" that all along they have been the back-bone of our churches and Sunday schools and workers; that when educated, cultured, skilled, advantaged hung back (same as described earlier in this paper) they took their places in the Sunday school and willingly, not grudgingly or perfunctorily, added to six days of toilsome manual labor a seventh for the Lord's work, and that manfully, often without recognition and without word of cheer. Sir, I speak of what I know, I testify of what I have seen; and I tell you that the famous Sunday schools of Lancashire and Yorkshire, of Wales and Cornwall (wherein today adults even to white hairs gather as well as the young), would have gone out of sight long ago had it not been for the "commonalty" who have given themselves to Sunday school work. After a ministry of nearly forty years, and experience in always large Sunday schools, I make bold to affirm that the Sunday school teachers who did most real and blessed service for the Master and for myself, were not your educated and cultured but your "uneducated" though not "unskilled" men and women of the working classes.

As I have stated, I agree with you absolutely as to the need of and place for all intellectual and scholarly gifts and acquirements. I reiterate, that I am the last to seek to lessen "scientific study of the Bible" whether for pulpit or Sunday school; I would raise rather than lower the scholarship and culture required for the instructing of others; and I am not oblivious of the higher level of education with you as with us. But, after all, may not too much be made of the "scientific study of the Bible?" Is it not to forget that for many a long day the proportion of scientifically trained members of our churches and Sunday schools must be a mere minority? I pronounce it "ludicrous" and "criminal" to exact for the Sunday school teachers your ten heads of plan (p. 166), or to advise the occupying of the all too brief Sunday school hours with such merely informing matters. I protest that the Sunday school is no place for instructing on your ten things (whatever the summer schools may be); that God's sabbath is no day for imparting information merely but for an infinitely higher thing, transformation—not for knowledge only but saving knowledge; that the Sunday school ought to be sacred for spiritual instruction on the supreme facts of human nature and of redemption. For these spiritual results the church needs not your scholar, nor theologian, nor book-learned men, but your men and women taught of the Holy Ghost and given wisdom in answer to the prayers of faith; twice-born men and women, who can speak "from faith to faith," by speaking and teaching out of their own actual experience of conversion and sanctification and the hope of glory. These are the grand essentials, the solid fundamentals, and however (in a sense) "uneducated and unskilled" a Sunday school teacher

may chance to be, if he knew the "word of the Lord" his class will soon find it out and be thrilled into interest and held captive blessedly. I do not for a moment doubt that you will accept these as the issues to be sought—to gain and retain souls for Christ, to win by grace of God, the scholars of the Sunday school to be "found *in* Christ" and to possess and be possessed by the life of God. It isn't learning of science but gracious wisdom that secures these ends. It is godly men and women whose daily lives and whole bearing tell that they "walk" with Jesus, ever yearning for the "closer walk." It is for such teachers and by such teaching that the Sunday school scholars are taught reverence—awe—worship—prayerfulness—faith—hope—love—the necessity of the "new birth"—of growth in the inner life, increasing with the name of God, or sanctity—Christ-like lives through the Holy Ghost—fellowship of the saints—consecration. *Ergo* whenever the Holy Ghost has made a man a Christian, *ceteris paribus*, you have there a man (or woman) whom Jesus Christ will own and use; and so he is to be welcomed, not snubbed; appraised, not under-valued. I insist on this aspect the more strenuously because the whole strain of your paper leads up to substitution of scholarly teaching for spiritual and head-cultured for heart-cultured teachers. Surely with so much and such rich literature available for week-day, it is to forget the design of the Christian sabbath—of the assembly of the church and of the Sunday school—to subordinate the spiritual to the intellectual, or grace grading into grace, to mere adding to knowledge on external matters. In a word, I must hold that the Sunday school ought to have for *motif*, and impulse, and fruit, the winning of the scholars for Christ as in the old-fashioned but still vital phraseology, to save souls.

I hope that you will forgive any unintentional sharpness of phrasing, and allow this Remonstrance to appear in the BIBLICAL WORLD as a pepper-corn acknowledgment of intellectual and spiritual debt to the American pulpit and to the American Sunday school literature.